

**Animation
as a
form of
subsistence**

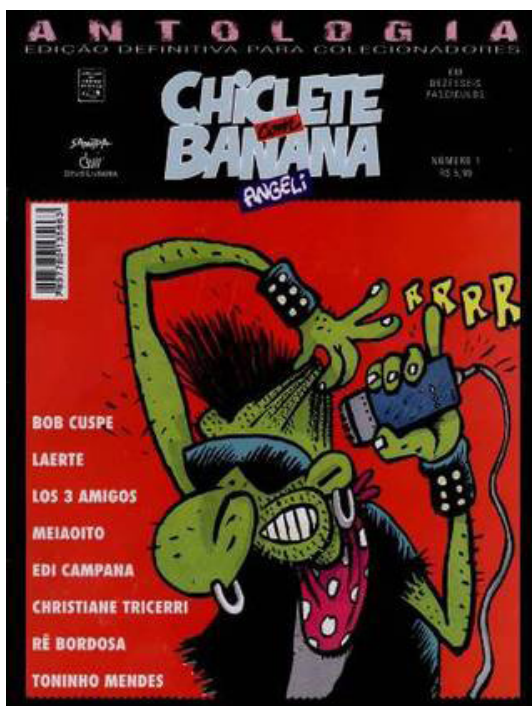
'Bob Spit: We Do Not Like People': Animation as a form of subsistence

Nicolas Raffin

What is the legacy of the underground? Is it compatible with any form of subsistence? Those are the questions that filmmaker/ animator Cesar Cabral, founder of the company Coala Filmes, skilfully raises in the sassy and free-spirited *Bob Spit: We Do Not Like People*.

Free-spirited, but also free-formed: a portrait documentary, an animated adventure, a comedy – *Bob Spit* is a work that feels liberated from rigid forms and categories imposed by the film industry. In that regard, it is not surprising that the film, despite the quality of its craft, its authenticity and universality, has barely been shown outside the festival circuit and its country of production, Brazil.

Born in 1956 in São Paulo, Arnaldo Angeli Filho, known as Angeli, started publishing his first caricatures at the age of 19 in local newspapers. In 1983, he becomes popular with his ongoing character Chiclete com Banana (literally 'Gum with banana'), which leads him to launch the eponymous magazine a year later. Angeli resorts to his publication, characterized by its dark humour and sarcastic view on contemporary Brazil, as a playground to develop many characters, including the grumpy, aging punk Bob Cuspe (Bob Spit).



The cover of *Chiclete com Banana* #1, 1983

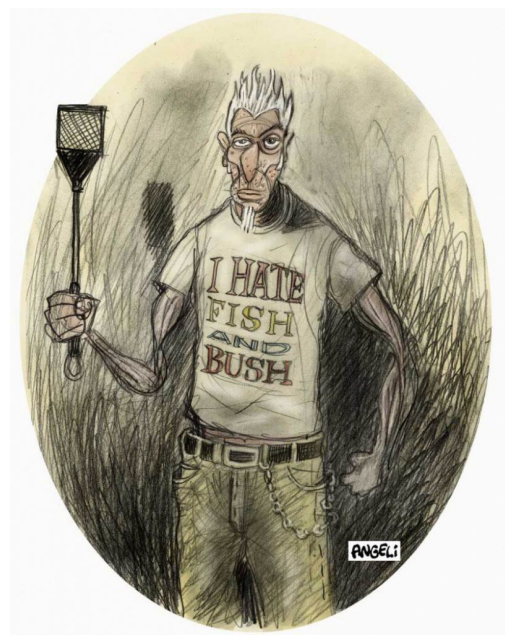
In the likes of Terry Zwigoff's seminal portrayal of American cartoonist Robert Crumb, whom Angeli refers to as one of his main influences, Cesar Cabral draws direct lines between the cartoonist's private life and the characters that emerge from his drawings. Angeli, who has regularly evoked in interviews his inner 'vocation for delinquency', projects himself into Bob Spit, who serves as his alter ego in a world in which sociability and societal codes have fully disappeared. Taking the latter as a backdrop, Cabral wonders:

*What if a retiring Angeli were to meet
a revigorated Bob Spit?*

As a matter of fact, Cabral's work is complex and dense in the peculiar way it blends portrait documentary and fiction/fantasy. In the antipodes of Terry Zwigoff's work, in which the emphasis is entirely placed on Crumb's eccentricities, Cesar Cabral bluntly throws himself into Angeli's exuberance and embraces it; blending *ifs* and *hows*, guided by one principle: the more provocative, the better. The viewer witnesses a playful act between two creators: the so-referred Creator, Angeli, and the film's creator Cabral. Angeli becomes a malleable cartoon character in an agile *mise-en-abyme* reversing the author/ character status and questioning notions of authorship and belonging.

The playfulness of Cesar Cabral – the Animator – also reveals itself in the craft. If, at first, the animated form may feel particularly appropriate for a film about a cartoonist, it in fact operates as a reversal of sorts. By mixing raw audio tapes of recorded interviews with his own animation, Cabral effectively provokes the viewer: whereas the sound is real and tangible, the image is fabricated. While the viewer watches Cabral's appropriation of Angeli's cartoons instead of the cartoonist's original drawings, the viewer listens to Angeli's real, recorded voice. The voice becomes the main artifact for identification with an emblematic cartoonist whom we, as viewers, are eager to discover more of his work. This whip-smart construction becomes even more impactful when considering that Angeli officially ended his career earlier this year after being diagnosed with aphasia, following a career spanning across fifty-one years.

As a film, *Bob Spit: We Do Not Like People* unfolds as an act of resistance. By portraying Angeli's now disappearing universe, embodied by his own voice, Cabral defeats the retired cartoonist's forced disappearance from the public sphere. By revigorating the character of Bob Spit, Cabral makes him immortal – quite an irony for an old, anti-social and overtly cynical punk just waiting for his time to come. Finally, by making both Angeli and Bob Spit topical again, Cabral upholds and reinstates the memory of the suburban alienation so extensively detailed across Angeli's drawings throughout the years. Animation is a form of subsistence, Cabral tells us, and both Angeli and his legacy remain well alive within it.



Angeli by Angeli

Nicolas Raffin is ICA's Film Programme Manager